



AC Milan midfielder Kaka (L) shrugs off the attention of AS Roma midfielder Daniele de Rossi (C) during their Serie A match at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Saturday.

## LUCARELLI BAGS TREBLE

# Inter close to finish line

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan won 2-0 at home to relegation-threatened Parma on Sunday to move within touching distance of the Serie A title.

The visitors frustrated the reigning champions for 55 minutes before goals from Brazilian Maxwell and Argentine striker Hernan Crespo ended the visitors' stubborn resistance.

A far from straightforward victory left Inter still unbeaten on 79 points, 20 ahead of second-placed Roma, who drew 1-1 with AC Milan on Saturday.

Inter, who finished third last season but were awarded the title after Juventus and AC Milan were found guilty of match-fixing, need just eight more points from their remaining nine games to be certain

of retaining the Scudetto.

Crespo, who played for Parma when he first arrived in Italy before spells with Lazio and AC Milan, said he was looking forward to becoming a champion for the first time.

"Unfortunately I have been a runner-up three times in Italy, but I think my luck's about to change," he said.

"We have a big advantage, and although it's mathematically possible that we can be caught, it looks as if the title race is over."

Lazio strengthened their grip on third place with a 4-2 win at Udinese. A seventh consecutive victory for the 2000 champions put them on 52 points, seven behind city rivals Roma but four ahead of Parma who could only manage a goalless draw at Torino.

Luca Sestini scored twice as Empoli boosted their chances of a Champions League place for next season with a resounding 4-1 home win against bottom club Ascoli.

Victory for the division's surprise

package left them in fifth place on 45 points, three less than Palermo but one more than AC Milan.

Florentina, who are chasing a UEFA Cup place, threw away a two-goal lead in their 2-2 draw at Atalanta while Cagliari boosted their survival hopes with a 2-0 home win over fellow relegation candidates Messina.

Livorno captain Cristiano Lucarelli scored a hat-trick in his side's 4-1 hammering of Catania, while Chievo remain in danger of the drop after a 1-1 draw at home to Sampdoria.

Inter were struggling to find a way through against Parma before a moment of magic from Maxwell beat the stalemate.

The 25-year-old wingback chased a wayward pass from compatriot Maicon and kept the ball from going out of play with a clever touch that also enabled him to get past Damiano Ferronetti tight on the left touchline.

In Saturday's other match, Siena eased their relegation fears with a precious 1-0 win at fellow strugglers Reggina.

exchanged passes with Crespo before swerving past three Parma defenders and firing an angled shot into the top corner with his left foot.

Crespo practically extinguished Parma's hopes of taking the lead from the match in the 70th minute, tapping into an empty net after a square pass from Adriano.

Parma threw caution to the wind in the last 20 minutes and Inter were indebted to their keeper Francesco Toldo for a string of fine saves that preserved their two-goal cushion.

On Saturday Roma and AC Milan, who are both involved in next week's Champions League quarter-finals, played out a draw at the Olympic stadium.

French defender Philippe Mexes gave Roma an early lead with a rising drive from the edge of the box, before Alberto Gilardino equalised with a glancing header.

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The former Ajax player then

## Barca find breathing space

AFP, Madrid



goalkeeper Iker Casillas denied them another goal.

"It was an open game. With a bit of luck, this will get me in the starting line-up," said Robinho, whose relationship with Real coach Fabio Capello has sometimes been strained.

The game ended on a sour note for Real with Jose Maria Gutierrez getting carelessly sent off after receiving two yellow cards in less than a minute in injury time.

The victory means Real remain third, five points behind bitter rivals Barca.

Racing Santander improved their chances of qualifying for European competition for the first time when they won 5-4 in a bizarre game with relegation-threatened Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

"I'm happy to have won but when your team concedes four goals you know, as a coach, that you haven't done your job," reflected a bemused Racing coach Miguel Angel

Portugal. "Well at least the fans had some fun and we can continue dreaming about Europe but we committed a lot of errors which we are going to have to sit down and analyse," added Portugal.

Athletic went ahead from a Luis Prieto free-kick after seven minutes but the fire works started in earnest after the break.

Eight second half goals, including five within a 12 minute period, were topped off by a winner from Racing's Nicola Zigic less than two minutes before the whistle.

The defeat leaves Athletic in deeper relegation trouble, third from bottom and the possibility looms ever larger that the historic Basque club will be relegated from the first division for the first time.

Bottom club Gimnastic Tarragona got a 1-1 draw with Recreativo Huelva but still remain at the foot of the Spanish first division.

Recreativo's Florent Sinama Moral and Francisco Casquero.

Pongol opened the scoring after 10 minutes, chipping the ball over the head of Gimnastic's oncoming goalkeeper Albano Bizarri from the edge of the area.

However, Gimnastic were back on level terms within five minutes thanks to a blistering left foot shot from 20 metres by Javier Portillo.

Getafe came from two goals down to snatch a point in a 2-2 draw with fifth-placed Real Zaragoza.

Sergio Garcia put Zaragoza ahead midway through the first half and Andres D'Alessandro got one of the best goals of the season 10 minutes before the break, scoring from a wonderful free kick 35 metres out on the right wing.

Getafe replied through Manu Del Moral and Francisco Casquero.



Real Madrid striker Ruud Van Nistelrooy runs off in celebration after netting a penalty during their Primera Liga encounter against Celta Vigo at Vigo on Sunday.

## Totti fuming at Fergie

AFP, Rome

Not mentioning Francesco Totti when listing Roma's best players is tantamount to treason in the Eternal City.

And Sir Alex Ferguson's exclusion of the exalted number 10 among the players Manchester United most fear has added spice to Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final, first leg here on Wednesday.

Romans are up in arms that Ferguson, when asked which Roma players he most admired, allegedly overlooked Totti and cited midfielders Daniele De Rossi and Mancini as their key men.

And on Sunday, Totti had a stark warning for the Manchester United manager.

"I accept Ferguson's opinion of me, and I hope to make sure he remembers my name," Totti told Sky Sports Italia.

Totti also took a swipe at England and English football, saying he has never been tempted to play in the Premiership.

"I've never liked English football, even though many great players play there," said the 30-year-old Italian World Cup winner.

"I don't like English football, and I don't like England where the weather is miserable."

## England stars feared for life

AFP, London

England defender Luke Young has revealed that several of the national team's stars feared they would be attacked by their own supporters during the Euro 2008 qualifier against Andorra.

Young was among a group of players who were subjected to vicious abuse from English supporters as they sat in the stands at the Olympic Stadium in Barcelona on Wednesday to watch England's 3-0 win.

Frank Lampard was singled-out for especially personal criticism and, along with Young and the rest of his non-playing teammates, decided not to return to his seat for the second half.

Charlton right-back Young was shocked by the ugly atmosphere.

"I was up in the stands and there were sections of the crowd not really watching the game, just throwing abuse at the players who weren't playing," said Young.

"It's disappointing for the manager because after just 14 minutes the boots started – I looked up at the clock to check the time.

"The guys who weren't subs didn't come out for the second half because we were worried for our own safety."

"Steven Gerrard said it was one of the toughest games he'd played in because of the crowd reacting to us like that."

England assistant coach Terry Venables believes players will consider quitting international duty if the abuse continues, but Young is determined not to be put off.

"It's been building up over a period of time and it's difficult for the boys," said the 27-year-old.

"But it would never stop me playing for England and that goes for everyone in the squad."

"If anything it makes you more determined to be involved and to try and prove a few people wrong."

## Capello's humble way

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Fabio Capello conceded that his team were lucky to get three points against relegation-threatened Celta Vigo despite winning 2-1 on Sunday.

"A draw would have been fair. Both teams went out to win and neither of the two just went out to defend. I liked what my players did and we were facing a good team in Celta Vigo," said Capello.

Capello also had high praise for Robinho, who came on as a second half substitute and secured three points for Real with a winner seven minutes before the end.

"He's back to being a deciding factor (in games)," said Capello, paying tribute to the Brazilian international striker with whom he has often had strained relations.

Robinho also scored in Real's last game, a 2-0 win over struggling Gimnastic Tarragona two weeks ago.

"Robinho had a great game but then all the players played well. I hope we can carry on like this in the following games," added Capello, who has regularly repeated his belief in recent weeks that Real can still win the Spanish title.

They are currently in third place in La Liga, five points behind the league leaders and their bitter rivals Barcelona.

Robinho's late winner left Capello's opposite number Fernando Vazquez to lament, "Football once again is unfair to Celta. We deserved to win or at least draw."

"I'm proud of the players. We showed a lot of courage against Real. We played well and the only worrying thing is that we are not winning at home. This is clearly affecting our mental state," added Vazquez.

## HACKETT ERA ENDS

# Phelps makes history

## Swimming

AFP, Melbourne

Michael Phelps capped an historic world championships with his seventh gold medal Sunday and another world record as Grant Hackett lost a 1500m freestyle race for the first time in 11 years.

The irrepressible American sliced more than two seconds off his own 400m individual medley world record to hit the wall in 4:06.22 and become the only swimmer to win seven gold at a single world championship.

"Training wise and racing wise, this is probably the best moment I've had," said the 21-year-old, who has set four individual world marks here and one with the freestyle relay team.

"I didn't expect to be two seconds under the world record. I saw at 150m I was 1 under the record. It's the last race and I wanted to finish off strong."

Fellow American Katie Hoff shattered a seven-year-old record in the women's 400m medley, touching in 4:32.89 ahead of

Russia's Yana Martynova and Australian Stephanie Rice.

In total, 14 world records tumbled in Melbourne.

But Phelps' quest for eight gold medals was cruelly ended when the United States 4x100m medley relay team was disqualified in the heats after Ian Crocker was judged to have left the blocks early.

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His medal tally surpassed the six Ian Thorpe won at the 2001 event in Japan to make Phelps the most decorated swimmer in champion-

ship history with 20 medals, taking the mantle from Hackett who has 18.

Australia's Libby Lenton was also firing, grabbing her fifth gold of the meet, the most ever by an Australian woman, by touching first in the 50m freestyle in 24.53.

Sweden's Therese Alshammar was second and Dutchwoman Marleen Veldhuis third.

"Just to finish off the meet with another gold medal is so incredible," said Lenton. "It's definitely pretty special. I am kind of used to having a great meet and then a not so great meet. To have the consistency is fantastic."

With the eight days of swimming wrapped up, the United States easily topped the medal table with 20 gold to Australia's nine as they start the countdown to the Beijing Olympics.

## Kalou keeps Chelsea alive

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho admitted that Chelsea had been on the brink of surrendering their Premiership title on Saturday after he was forced to wait until the 93rd minute before Salomon Kalou grabbed the winner at both sides.

Just as it seemed that Watford had done enough to earn a draw that would have allowed Manchester United to stretch their lead at the top to eight points, the Dutch striker drifted into the box to meet Andrey Shevchenko's cross and head the ball past United's on-loan goalkeeper Ben Foster.

Afterwards, Mourinho admitted that the title race would have been effectively over if Kalou had not taken his chance to ensure that the champions matched United's win over

Blackburn earlier in the day.

"Mathematically we could still win because there are still 21 points in the game, but if you go to eight behind it is much more difficult," Mourinho said. "It was a crucial goal and a crucial victory."

Stir points clear with seven matches to play, United remain firmly in the driving seat. But the last-gasp nature of Chelsea's win will only strengthen the champions' belief that they can close the gap.

United had to come from behind to beat Blackburn 4-1, but once they hit their stride they were irresistible.

At Matt Derbyshire strike had given Blackburn a half-time lead. But after a superb solo equaliser from Paul Scholes just after the hour, goals from Michael Carrick, Park Ji-Sung and substitute Ole Gunnar Solskjær ensured an ultimately comfortable win.

Ferguson claimed his side had shown that they deserve to reclaim the title.



Chelsea players erupt in joy and congregate in celebration after Salomon Kalou scored a late goal to give them victory in their Premiership match against Watford on Saturday.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer</